Partners of the Tide

...By...
JOSEPH C. LINCOLN,
Author of "Cap'n Eri"

(Continued.)

"Well," she exclaimed, "this is the worst—I never did— There, Tempy, if this ain't a lesson in keepin' bad company, then I don't know. Augusty, you'd better go home, I think."

Gus looked at Bradley appealingly, then at the sisters, and, with another burst of sobs, flung herself out of the door and slammed it behind her.

"That awful dog girl!" sputtered Miss Tempy. "I knew what she was doing the time she spoiled this very dress with her dreadful critters. Bradley Nickerson, don't you ever speak to her again. Now promise."

But that promise the boy would not make, although the argument lasted for an hour and ended in his being sent to his room without his supper.

"It looks to me," said Miss Prissy that night, "as if we'd got about as much on our hands as you and me could handle, Tempy."

"It certainly does," agreed her sister earnestly. "I think it's our duty to ask Cap'n Titcomb's advice right off."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the captain called, which he did the next forenoon, the tale of Bradley's eventful first day at school was told him in all its harrowing completeness. Miss Prissy, by previous agreement, acted as story teller, and Miss Tempy was a sort of chorus, breaking in every few moments to supply a neglected detail or comment on a particular feature.

"And we didn't know what to do," concluded Miss Prissy. "He wan't goin' to tell us whose dog it was, and"—

"I don't b'lieve he ever would have said," broke in Miss Tempy, "if that 'dog girl' herself hadn't come bouncin' in, and"—

"And he won't promise not to speak to her again, neither," continued the elder sister. "We sent him to bed without any supper"—

"That is, any real supper," interrupted the chorus. "Of course we took up some cookies and things when we found he wouldn't come down, but"—

"And he won't promise this mornin', and he went to school without pecmise'. What do you think we ought to do, Cap'n Titcomb?"

"Bradley's noisy and a tomboy," said Miss Prissy decidedly.

"Yes," said Miss Tempy; "and she likes those dreadful dogs."

"Um—hum," answered their visitor, with unimpeachable seriousness. "Of course that's a terrible drag, but maybe she'll cut 'em adrift when she gits older."

"Well, we don't like her," said Miss Prissy, with decision. "And we wish you'd speak to Bradley about it. You know," she added, looking down, "I put a lot of dependence in your judgment, Cap'n Titcomb."

"So do I," said Miss Tempy quickly; "just as much as Prissy does. I b'lieve in you absolutely, Cap'n Ezra."

"Yes, yes, of course," hurriedly replied the captain. "Well, I'll speak to the boy by and by and see what I can do."

"Brad," he said, as they came out of the Allen gate after dinner, "what's this I hear 'bout you gittin' the rope's end yesterday? Never mind spinnin' the whole yarn. I cal'late I've heard the most of it. You and the Hammond boy had a scrimmage, too, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Bradley doggedly.

"Hum! Think you'd have licked him if the skipper hadn't took a hand?"

Bradley looked up at his questioner, saw the twinkle in his eye and answered with a sheepish grin: "Don't know. Guess I'd have tried mighty hard."

"Think you'd have licked him?"

The captain roared. "I presume likely you would," he chuckled. "I understand you've sort of took that little Baker craft next door in tow. She seems like a smart girl. Do you like her?"

"Yes, sir."

"I jedge Prissy and Tempy wouldn't enter her for the cup. Now, Brad, mind I ain't coaxin' you to go back on a friend, but the old mai—that is, your ladies at home, have set out to make a man of you. They're your owners, and you're expected to sail 'cordin' to their orders. If there's one thing that I've always stuck to it's 'Obey orders or break owners.' Sometimes owners' orders don't like exactly with your own ideas, but never mind—they pay the wages, see?"

"She's a good girl," said the boy stoutly. "She came in and took my part when she didn't have to, and I like her. And I won't promise not to speak to her, neither."

The captain looked down at the lad's square jaw and whistled.

"Well," he said, "I don't b'lieve you need to promise, but don't whoop too loud about it. Run as close to the wind as you can, and don't carry all sail in a two reef breeze jest to show you ain't afraid to. Catch my drift?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bradley, rather doubtfully. "You mean be chums with the girl, but don't tell Miss Prissy and Miss Tempy about it."

"No-o." Captain Ezra looked somewhat put out by the literal interpretation. "That ain't jest it. Be—well, be easy, and— Oh, thunder! Let it go at that. I guess you know what I mean. How do you think you're goin' to like your school?"

Bradley answered, "Pretty well, I guess, when I get more used to it;" but, although he did not say so, he was certain that it would take some time to get used to it. As a matter of fact, however, that very lively first day was the only serious trouble for him during the entire term. He was quick to learn and so found little difficulty with his studies and advanced as rapidly as other boys of his age. As for his behavior, it was no worse than that of any other healthy youngster. At the end of the year he was "promoted"—that is, he was no longer a member of the fourth class, but instead proudly left his seat when the third was called.

Gus was "promoted" also, much to the surprise of the "old maids," who could not believe there was any good in the "dog girl." They gradually ceased to urge the boy not to have anything to do with her, for the very good reason that in this matter their urging was of no avail. They grew to understand their colt better as the months passed, and they learned just how tight a rein it was advisable to draw.

Bradley also grew to understand the sisters. He discovered that Miss Prissy was the business woman and that she paid all the bills, bought all the household supplies and did it without consulting Miss Tempy, whom she treated as a sort of doll with a mechanism that must not be jarred.

Bradley made friends among the village boys and did not make any virulent enemies. He had his interrupted fight "out" with Sam Hammond and emerged a conqueror with a black eye and a swollen nose, which were the cause of his being in disgrace at home for a week. Also he joined the "Jolly club," a secret society that met on Saturday afternoons in "Snuppy" Black's barn.

During the long summer vacation there were chores to do, but there was also all sorts of fun along shore, digging clams on the flats, spearing flatfish along the edge of the channels or rare and much prized trips to the fish weirs where the nets were hauled. Captain Titcomb came home in August for an intended stay of two weeks, and he made the boy happy by taking him for an all day sail and blue fishing excursion off Setuckit Point.

That fishing trip had unexpected and fateful results. The captain had called on Miss Prissy and her sister the morning of his arrival in Orham and, as was his custom, had brought each of them a present—exactly alike, of course. He had promised to dine at the Allen house the following Sunday. But it happened that Peleg Myrick wanted to make one of his infrequent visits to the mainland that week, and he seized the opportunity to hail the catboat containing Bradley and Captain Ezra as it passed his quahaug dory and beg for a passage up.

Mr. Peleg Myrick was a hermit. He lived alone in a little two room shanty on the beach about half a mile from Setuckit Point. He owned a concertina that squeaked and wailed and a Mexican dog—gift of a wrecked skipper—that shivered all the time and howled when the concertina was played. Peleg was certain that the howling was an attempt at singing and boasted that Skeezicks—that was the dog's name—had an "ear for music jest like a human."

Among his other accomplishments Mr. Myrick numbered that of weather prophet. He boasted that he could "smell a storm further 'n a cat can smell fish." It was odd, but he really did seem able to foretell or guess what the weather would be along the Orham coast, and the longshoremen swore by his prophecies.

He was a great talker when he had any one to talk to and was a gossip whose news items were usually about three months old. Captain Ezra appreciated odd characters, and he welcomed the chance to get a little fun out of Peleg.

"Well, Peleg," said the captain as the catboat stood about on the first leg of the homeward stretch, "what's the news down the beach? Any of the sand fleas got married lately?"

"Don't ask me for no news, Cap'n Ez!" replied Mr. Myrick. "You're the feller to have news. You ain't married yit, be you?"

"No; not yet. I'm waitin' to see which girl you pick out; then I'll see what's left."

"Well, I ain't foolin'. I thought you might be married by now. Last time I was up to the village—'long in June, 'twas—I see M'lissy Busteed, and she said 'twas common talk that you was courtin' one of the old maids."

Captain Titcomb scowled and looked uneasily at his passenger.

"She did, hey?" he grunted.

"Yes. I told her I didn't take no stock in that. 'Cap'n Ez,' I says, 'has been courtin' too many times sence I can remember,' I says. 'One time 'twas Mary Emma Cahoon, 'nother time 'twas Seth Wingate's sister's gal, then ag'in 'twas' "—

"All right! All right!" broke in the captain, glancing hurriedly at Bradley. "Never mind that. How's the quahaugin' nowadays? Gittin' a fair price?"

"Pretty fair," replied Peleg. Then, with the persistency of the born gossip, not to be so easily diverted from his subject, he went on: "I told M'lissy that, but she said there wan't scarcely a doubt that you meant bus'ness this time. Said you fetched presents every time you come home. Said the only doubt in folks' minds was whether 'twas Prissy or Tempy you was after. Said she was sure you was after one on 'em, 'cause she as much as asked 'em one time when she was at their house, and they didn't deny it."

Mr. Myrick talked steadily on this and other subjects all the way to the wharf, but Captain Ezra was silent and thoughtful. He shook hands with Bradley at the gate of the Traveler's Rest and said goodby in an absentminded way.

"I s'pose you'll be 'round to dinner Sunday, Cap'n Ez?" said the boy.

"Hey? Sunday? Well, I don't know. It might be that I shall be called back to the schooner sooner than I expect. Can't tell."

Sure enough, the next day the sisters received a note from their expected guest saying that he was obliged to leave at once for Portland and could not, therefore, be with them on Sunday. The ladies were disappointed, but thought nothing more of the matter at the time. It was nearly six months before the captain visited Orham again, and during this visit he did not come near the big house. He waylaid Bradley, however, asked him all about himself, how he was getting on at school and the like, but when the boy asked if he, the captain, wasn't "comin' round to see the folks pretty soon" the answer was vague and unsatisfactory.

"Why, I—I don't know's I'll have time," was the reply. "I'm pretty busy, and— Give 'em my regards, will you, Brad? I've got to be runnin' on now. So long."

It was the same during the next "shore leave," the following November. Captain Titcomb saw Bradley several times, gave him a six bladed jackknife and took him for a drive over to the big cranberry swamp owned by the Ostable company, but he did not call on the old maids.

Three more years of school and vacations, with "chores" and sailing and cranberry picking, followed. Bradley was sixteen. His voice, having passed through the squeaky "changing" period, now gave evidence of becoming what Miss Tempy called a "beautiful double bass, jest like father's." He was large for his age, and his shoulders were square. He was more particular about his clothes now, and his neckties were no longer selected by Miss Tempy. To be seen with girls was not so "sissified" in his mind as it used to be, but he still stuck to Gus, and she was his "first choice" at parties, and he saw her home from prayer meeting occasionally.

"Tempy, we've hardly got any money left!"

As for the "dog girl" herself, she, too, paid more attention to clothes, and her pets—though still numerous and just as disreputable in appearance—were made to behave with more decorum. Her hair was carefully braided now, her dresses came down to her boot tops, and Miss Tempy grudgingly admitted that "if 'twas anybody else, I should say she was likely to be good lookin' when she grows up."

The "last day" came, and Bradley and Gus were to graduate. In Orham there is no graduation day. The eventful ending of the winter term is the "last day," and all the parents and relatives, together with the school committee and the clergymen, visit the school to sit stiffly on the settees and witness the ceremonies.

That evening after the "last day" exercises at school Bradley sat at home reading in the dining room. Miss Tempy, in the sitting room, was going over, for the fortieth time since it was written, the wonderful argument in favor of a "republican form of government," which Bradley had composed and had read at the school that day. As her sister entered the room she dropped the roll of paper in her lap and said solemnly:

"Prissy Allen, it's my belief that when that boy first came here and I said that I wanted him to go to college and be a minister I was inspired. I declare I do! I've jest been readin' that piece of his again, and it beats any sermon I ever heard."

Miss Prissy seated herself in a rocker and looked solemnly at her sister. For a minute she gazed without speaking. Then suddenly, as if she had made up her mind, she rose, gave the dining room door a swing that would have shut it completely had not the corner of a mat interfered, and, coming back to her chair, said slowly, "Tempy, I'm afraid we'll never be able to send Bradley to college."

The precious manuscript fell from Miss Tempy's lap to the floor.

"Why—why, Prissy Allen!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean we can't do what we've hoped to do. Oh, dear! I—I don't know what we'll do. Tempy, we've hardly got any money left!"

CHAPTER V.

FOR a moment Miss Tempy made no reply to her sister's speech. Instead she sat there with her eyes fixed upon Miss Prissy's face and her thin fingers picking nervously at her dress.

"Haven't got any money?" she repeated after a pause. "Haven't got any money left? Why, then—why, then, we'll have to take it out of the savin's bank up to Boston. Of course, Bradley must go to college. You know he must, Prissy."

But Miss Prissy shook her head.

"You don't understand, Tempy," she said. "I ought to have talked with you about it long ago. I can see now that I ought to; but, oh, dear, father always said you was too delicate to bother with money matters, and I've been used to takin' all the care myself, and so I've jest gone on and on, worryin' and plannin' and layin' awake nights until I can't go on any further. Oh, Tempy," she cried, and the tears rolled down her cheeks, "you don't understand. The money in the Boston bank has all gone too. We haven't got more than $500 left in the world, and when that's gone"— She waved her hands despairingly.

But still Miss Tempy did not comprehend.

"Why, all of it can't be gone!" she said. "All of the insurance money and everything! Why, it was $5,000!" She mentioned the sum reverently and in an awestruck whisper.

"Yes," said Miss Prissy, trying hard not to be impatient; "yes, 'twas $5,000, and father died over ten years ago, and we've been livin' on it ever since."

"But $5,000, Prissy! Five thousand"—

"Oh, my soul and body! Anybody'd think 'twas a million. Jest think, now; jest think! We've lived on it for pretty nigh eleven years; paid for our clothes and livin' and havin' the house painted six years ago, and"—

"But it needed paintin'."

"Needed it! I should think it did! But it cost more'n we'd ought to spend, jest the same. Oh, it's more my fault than anybody's. Long's father lived the place was kept up, and you and me was used to havin' things as good as our neighbors, and I went on and on, never thinkin' we was too extravagant until all at once the money that we first put in the Harniss bank was used up. And then it come home to me, as you might say, and I realized what we'd been doin'. Oh, I've tried and tried; scrimped here and pinched there. What do you s'pose I sold the wood lot for? And then the cran'by swamp?"

"Why, you said we didn't need 'em, and it was too much trouble to run 'em."

"Said! Oh, I don't doubt I said all sorts of things to keep you from knowin'. But I sold 'em to help pay the bills. And then you was took down with the typhoid, and there was that big doctor's bill, and then Bradley came, and he had to have clothes and a little money to spend, like the other boys. And now!"

Miss Prissy choked, tried to go on, and then broke down and cried heartily and without restraint.

In all the years since the death of Captain Allen Miss Tempy had never seen her common sense, practical sister give way like this. The sight alarmed her much more than the story of the financial situation had so far done. She didn't fully understand the latter yet, but every one of Miss Prissy's sobs was to her a call for help that needed an immediate answer.

"There, there, there, dear!" she said, running to the other rocker and putting her arm around her sister's neck. "You poor thing! You mustn't cry like that. You've jest worried yourself sick. You're all worn out. I shouldn't be surprised if you've got a little cold, too, in that drafty schoolhouse. Let me make you a good, big cup of pepper tea right away; now do."

Miss Prissy turned a sob into a feeble laugh.

"Oh, dear me, Tempy," she said, laying her hand on the other's arm, "I b'lieve you think pepper tea'll cure anything, even an empty pocketbook. I wish 'twould pay bills; then, I don't know but I'd drink a hogshead. But it won't, nor cryin' won't, either. Set down, and I'll tell you jest how things are."

So Miss Tempy, reluctantly giving up the "pepper tea" idea for the present, went back to her chair, and Miss Prissy continued.

"The money in the Boston savin's bank is gone," she said, "and a year or more ago I wrote to the broker folks that bought the bond for us when father died, and they sold it for me and got a little less than a thousand dollars for it. I put the money into the bank at Harniss, and, though I've tried my best to be economical, there ain't but five hundred and eighty left. That and the place here is all we've got."

In a bewildered fashion Miss Tempy strove to grasp the situation.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A wise man contents himself with doing as much good as his situation allows him to do.—Lord Bolingbroke.

DECIDED AGAINST RAILROADS.

Inter-State Commerce Commission Renders an Opinion That If Applied to All Commodities and Interior Points Will Revolutionize Rates.

Washington, March 2.—The interstate commerce commission today decided the two cases against the Northern Pacific, the Great Northern and the Union Pacific. The counts passed on were:

First: That the rates from Eastern destinations to Spokane were higher than to Seattle, a more distant point.

Second: That the rates to Spokane were inherenly unreasonable.

On the first point defendants maintained that water competition compelled them to charge the rates in effect at Seattle and that therefore they might charge a higher rate to Spokane without violating the long and short haul provision or without discriminating against Spokane under the law.

The commission sustains the claim of the defendant in this respect and holds that the rates to Spokane, although higher than to Seattle, are not unlawful.

On the second point the commission sustains the claim of the petitioner and holds that the rates from Eastern destinations to Spokane are unjust and unreasonable. It reduces class rates from St. Paul to Spokane 16 2-3 per cent., and makes substantially the same reduction from Chicago to Spokane. Rates east of Chicago are not dealt with.

The decision, if applied in principle, to all commodities and to all interior points must work a revolution in rates from Eastern points of origin to all interior transcontinental territory, and in that view it is one of the most far-reaching decisions ever rendered by the commission.

The case has been under consideration for approximately a year and a half. For many months the commission has been endeavoring to reach a determination of the intricate points involved, but not until within a few days was an agreement possible. The unanimous opinion of the commission was prepared by Commissioner Prouty.

COURT OPENS IN BISHOPVILLE.

Judge Gary Compliments County on Erection of New Court House—Solicitor Stoll Welcomed.

Bishopville, March 2.—The spring term of court of general sessions for the county convened yesterday morning at 10 o'clock. The court was delayed until the arrival of the morning train on account of the judge, solicitor and stenographer coming in on this train, but as soon as convenient the officers repaired to the court room, where Judge Ernest Gary in a few remarks pointed out to the grand jury their duty as grand jurors and incidentally complimented the county upon the erection of the new court house which is nearing completion.

After the solicitor, Mr. P. H. Stoll, had sworn a number of witnesses to go before the grand jury, they repaired to their room for deliberation and soon returned with two true bills, as follows: The State vs. Robert Mack, assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature and carrying concealed weapons; the State vs. Daniel Capells, resisting an officer and assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature.

It was with pleasure that the grand jury listened to the remarks of Judge Gary with regard to the court house, for it is he who first started the ball rolling which resulted in the erection of the new court house. This is the first time Solicitor Stoll has officially attended court in this county and his friends are very much pleased with his manner of handling his cases.

Greenwood, Feb. 21.—Mr. L. P. Rawlings, a well known traveling man, who made Greenwood his headquarters, was found dead in bed at the Oregon Hotel at half-past 12 today.